

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY SIDES WITH CONSUMERS ON TAUZIN-DINGELL

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today declared his opposition to the Internet Freedom and Broadband Deployment bill, more commonly known as the Tauzin-Dingell for its chief sponsors in the House of Representatives. Hinchey, who is scheduled to speak against the bill on the floor of the House, offered the following comments:

"Although there has been a lot of rhetoric and misleading advertising about this bill, there has been very little attention paid to the basic fact that it will lead to higher prices. Apparently, the leaders of this Congress and my upstate New York colleagues have not learned from the history of deregulation in the telecommunications industry.

"Since the breakup of AT&T in the 1980s, the Baby Bells have longed to get into the long distance market. They knew Congress wouldn't let them do that without forcing them to open up their local markets to long distance companies. So they wrote up some rules and submitted them to the Gingrich Congress, which dutifully incorporated them into the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

"I was one of only 16 House members who opposed the bill and I was proud to do so, because I believed that it lifted essential consumer protections and would result in much higher rates. Six years later, the promises of the 1996 Act remain unfilled. Phone and cable rates have soared with no end in sight. Now the Bells want us to eliminate what little protection against monopoly the '96 Act provided.

"According to the Telecommunications Act, the Bells would be allowed to enter the long distance market if they allowed their competitors access to their network of lines, thereby opening local markets to competition. Since they wrote this provision themselves, one would think they would abide by it. But instead, they have spent six years trying to repeal it.

"The bill before us today would amend the 1996 Act to allow the Bells to provide broadband services outside their existing local service areas. It allows the Bells to exclude competitors from any individual element of their local network that has been upgraded for broadband use. It also exempts the Bells' broadband services from federal and state regulation. The bill leaves consumers without any protections from poor service, unreasonably high rates, and unsolicited email or spam. It also fails to guarantee that all consumers will have access to these new services and virtually wipes out competition in the DSL market. It continues the consumer-unfriendly policies enacted in 1996, essentially handing the Bells a monopoly on a silver platter.

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"I agree with the bill's supporters that it is critically important to get high-speed internet services to under-served areas. There will be two amendments offered to this bill that would vastly improve it and I intend to support them. The upstate New York economy would benefit greatly from the universal availability of broadband technology. But in its current form Tauzin-Dingell legitimizes unfair monopolies. It brings us back to the days before the breakup of AT&T, and ensures that consumers will continue to face sharp increases in their telecommunications costs."